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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Santé de la reproduction pour une maternité sans risque, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Theme: "*Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work*"

1. The concepts of education and development are closely linked in the context of the desire for survival and for a harmonious life: education is a process that allows human beings to develop their capacities in order to reach their potential; development makes these capacities and potential available for use.

2. In order to maintain progress towards all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (DPRS), including gender equality and empowerment of women, there must be greater emphasis on access of girls to education.

3. It is increasingly obvious that the education of girls prevents intergenerational transmission of poverty and promotes progress towards the MDGs and the DPRS, including reduction of maternal and child mortality and access to decent employment. Educated women have fewer children and are more inclined to send them to school. There is a correlation between mothers' education and the reduction of maternal and child mortality and morbidity.

4. Secondary education allows the enjoyment of other rights, by enabling girls to benefit from social and economic development. Studies have shown that women with more years of schooling earn 10 to 20 per cent more.

5. A major obstacle to girls' school enrolment and to their completion of their studies is the violence to which they are subjected at school and on the way to school. The presence of female teachers may reduce the incidence of violence and create safer school environments for girls. In sub-Saharan Africa, the presence of female teachers results in enrolment of more girls in primary school.

6. It is crucial to ensure that girls receive quality education. Outdated curricula depicting women in subservient roles accentuate gender inequalities. It is essential for the attainment of the MDGs for women to have access to employment and control of the land, because this will reduce poverty and enhance food security. However, access to these resources also has important benefits for women: by controlling the land, women can achieve a more secure livelihood and improved access to other resources, including credit and other financial products, seeds and agricultural extension services. In rural communities, the land has a symbolic as well as an economic value, contributing to the status of women within their communities. When they earn their own income, women have a greater say in decision-making in the couple and can be less exposed to domestic violence. Yet many women are denied both decent work and control of the land.

7. For example, globally women provide from 70 to 90 per cent of care for persons living with HIV and AIDS, so that their work supplements inadequate health systems but is generally not recognized or supported. In the Niger, access to education may be measured by two indicators: the number of newly enrolled pupils and the gross enrolment ratio.

8. In 2007-2008, new enrolments in the first year of primary school (kindergarten) numbered 342,360. The figure was 158,600 in 2000-2001, giving an

average annual increase of 10 per cent. New enrolments of girls numbered 155,057 compared with 187,303 for boys. The percentage of girls enrolled thus increased from 40.7 per cent in 2000 to 45 per cent in 2008. The improvement in girls' enrolment is encouraging.

9. The gross enrolment ratio (number of children of any age enrolled in primary school compared with the number of school-age children multiplied by 100) was 63 per cent in 2007-2008 compared with 34 per cent in 1999-2008, representing a remarkable increase of 29 percentage points. In 2007-2008, the gross enrolment ratio was 54 per cent for girls, compared with 72 per cent for boys. Although the gross enrolment ratio for girls increased steadily (41 per cent for boys and 27 per cent for girls in 1999/2000, the gap in the gross enrolment ratio between girls and boys widened, increasing from 14 to 20 percentage points and then dropping to 18 percentage points in 2007-2008. This two-point reduction is basically due to the narrowing of the gap in first-year enrolment ratios. The gross enrolment ratio in rural areas increased sharply, reducing the difference between places of residence from 19 percentage points in 2000-2001 to 15 percentage points in 2007-2008.

10. Despite the progress made in girls' schooling, the absolute gap between girls and boys widened and girls are somewhat less successful than boys. The disparities are accentuated between primary education, where they account for almost half the students, and the second cycle of secondary education, where they represent only one fifth of the student body.

11. There are many kinds of vocational education and training. In 2007-2008, there were 13,379 students, or 8 per cent of secondary school pupils, attending institutions providing technical and vocational training. There were 7,222 girls (54 per cent) compared with 6,157 boys (46 per cent).

12. In 2006-2007, the target population for this type of education was estimated to be 294,546 pupils. The proportion of enrolments in vocational and technical secondary education and training was 2.5 per cent in 2004-2005. In 2007-2008, only 31 and 23 per cent were pursuing studies in the tertiary and industrial sectors. Girls accounted for 38.5 per cent of enrolments in the tertiary sector compared with 8.5 per cent in the industrial sector.

13. The very high cost of this type of education, the theoretical nature of the studies and the lack of immediate openings and of professional networks to enable graduates to set up their own business are probably responsible for this downward trend. As far as higher education is concerned, in 2007-2008 enrolment at the country's two universities was: 9,500 students (17 per cent girls) at the Université Abdou Moumouni in Niamey and 1,050 students (18 per cent girls) at the Université Islamique in Say.

14. In both urban and rural areas, there is generally very little Internet use, particularly by women and children. All these elements, particularly in remote parts of the country, are limiting factors for women and children. In 2008, there was almost no use of computers by children aged between 7 and 12, and 0.4 per cent among children between 13 and 18 years of age. Home computers are rare and almost non-existent. In 2004, less than 1 per cent of households owned one.

15. There is a very wide gap between men and women in the economic sphere. Analysis of the situation of women as regards equitable development reveals a number of negative trends that are obstructing the efforts made on their behalf. It is